Implementation Strategies to Reduce anti-Transgender Stigma and Increase Gender-Affirming Practice Adoption in Mental Health Care

Introduction: Anti-transgender stigma contributes to the disproportionately high rates of mental health problems faced by transgender and gender diverse youth (TGDY). TGDY benefit when their providers use gender-affirming practices (i.e., supportive clinical practices tailored to TGDY's needs). However, few mental health providers use gender-affirming practices due to a dearth of implementation strategies supporting practice adoption. As part of a larger study focused on developing and piloting a training to support the adoption of these practices (our primary implementation strategy), we identified several secondary implementation strategies. We propose an implementation strategy blueprint for promoting the adoption of gender-affirming practices.

Methods: The *Gender-Affirming Psychotherapy (GAP) Training* was systematically developed via collaboration with TGDY, their caregivers, and mental health providers, coupled with a clinical and empirical literature review. The pilot phase of this study was conducted in a multisite mental health clinic in New England. Researchers and clinic leaders identified several implementation strategies necessary for the successful rollout of the *GAP Training*, which we believe will promote long-term practice adoption.

Results: Based on community input, the training (primary implementation strategy) was online, self-paced, comprised 10 learning modules, and 8-hours long. Four secondary implementation strategies were identified in the pilot phase: 1) incentivising the completion of the training with CE credits, 2) using pre-pilot feedback from a pilot-site provider to tailor training content 3) frequent meetings with clinic "champions" to promote the training, and 4) updating intake forms to inclusively assess gender identity.

Discussion: To our knowledge, this is the first study to identify implementation strategies that may be necessary to enhance gender-affirming practice adoption and reduce providers' stigma. Results suggest that online training alone may not be sufficient for practice adoption. Rather, it may be necessary to employ a suite of strategies to promote sustainable practice adoption. Identified strategies may be generalizable to other populations experiencing significant health disparities.

Reference: Johansen, K., Rakhilin, M., Woodward, S., Jerskey, B., Moran, L., Roeder, K., Price, M. (2023, November). Implementation Strategies to Increase Mental Health Providers' Adoption of Gender-Affirming Practices. Oral presentation at the annual convention of the American Public Health Association, Atlanta, GA.